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AP Language and Composition 11

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Fast-Food: the Bad, the Evil, and the Gross

**Section I:**

Almost every day Americans hear about a super-sized problem facing our nation, obesity. One can barely watch an hour or two of the news without seeing a montage of close up,wide angle photographs of oversized glutei maximi or of large individuals shoving down on a large order of french-fries. But if obesity is such a problem, shouldn’t more American be alarmed? And what is the cause of this enormous elephant in the room that no one wishes to address? Very often the cause of such a problem is excessive amounts of fast-food. Many people then argue that if over eating is a problem, isn’t it the individual who can’t put down their fork and spoon to blame? You may be surprised to find that fast-food chains have methods to capture a customer and keep this client eating more and more salty fried food. How do these giant corporations stay in control of the American gullet? Lies, deceit, corruption, and colorful and flashy marketing campaigns. In the novel Chew On This!, Everything You Don’t Want To Know About Fast Food, the accredited Eric Schlosser wonderfully exposes the many flaws in the fast-food industry. The experienced author uses this book to target teenagers in an effort to educate the youth of America about a dire problem, the harms of the fast-food industry.

**Section II:**

Eric Schlosser is a very creditable writer. He graduated from Princeton with a degree in American History (Eric Schlosser’s Biography). This accomplishment may not seem pertinent to a writer’s creditability, but in his many novels Schlosser goes deep into the history of the subject to find the truth. The author has been a correspondent for *Atlantic Monthly* since 1996 (Eric Schlosser’s Biography). This clearly shows that Schlosser is a talented individual. The writer’s interest in the fast-food industry stemmed from an article he wrote about the topic for *Atlantic Monthly*. Schlosser then became very concerned with the wrongs of the fast-food industry and how it was affecting America. The journalist took his new found interest and channeled it into a book call Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All American Meal (Eric Schlosser’s Biography). The author decided that this novel, targeted at exposing the flaws of the fast-food industry, should be produced into a form teenage Americans could more clearly understand. The book, Chew On This! Everything You Don’t Want To Know About Fast Food, was created by this desire (Schlosser). Schlosser has never had any stake in the demise of the fast-food giant (Eric Schlosser’s Biography). The author undoubtedly does not possess an ulterior motive which perfectly qualifies him to be a reliable source of information of the plunders of the fast-food industry.

**Section III:**

In the novel Chew On This! Everything You Don’t Want To Know About Fast Food, Eric Schlosser addresses the main flaws of the fast-food industry: jobs, fries, meat, and pro-obesity stances. Schlosser first starts his book, however, by using his strong suit, history. The author tells the story of how the American fast-food industry got its start. In this section of the book Schlosser establishes ethos by showing an in-depth knowledge of the fast-food industry. For example Schlosser saw right through Colonel Harland Sander rouge, Sanders never severed in the military (Schlosser 29).

The next section of the book is devoted to discussing how the fast-food giants treat their employees. Many members of the McDonald’s staff are over worked (Schlosser 81). One student worker, Sadi, once worked from eight o’clock in the morning on a Saturday until three o’clock in the morning the next day (Schlosser 83). This is unacceptable. Students cannot be expected to perform well at school after being forced to work nineteen hours. The worst part of working for the fast-food giants is that they will not allow workers their constitutional right to form a union (Schlosser 88).

Pascal McDuff started working at a McDonalds in Montreal Canada in 1998. McDuff was clearly the hardest worker at his restaurant. When he received his performance review, the student saw that he has received the second highest review grade, yet he was named Employee of the Month. After further research, McDuff had found that none of the workers at the restaurant had received a high rating yet each employee had worked extremely hard. Pascal then found that a member of the McDonalds staff received a raise proportional to their performance rating; the managers would not give a raise. To respond to this injustice McDuff decided to unionize his workplace. In response, McDonalds threw every obstacle in the way of the union. After finally succeeding, this particular McDonalds was mysteriously shut down (Schlosser 83-91). This is extremely wrong. This phenomenon is the reason for the absence of unions from a single McDonalds in the Unites States (Schlosser 89). How can a business be considered reputable if it will not allow its workers a constitutional right because it may cost more money? This section of the book was a good appeal to both pathos and logos.

Only slightly more disgusting than McDonald’s policy on unions is how the restaurants prepare their fries. Originally employees at McDonalds would prepare their fries fresh every day from potatoes grown locally. Because this method was too time consuming and did not allow for uniformity the fast-food mogul decided to purchase frozen fries (Schlosser 92). The fries are then prepared in oil. Originally, however, the fries were fried in beef fat to create a product that tasted similar to the famous McDonalds hamburger. The restaurant did not tell the public that their famous side dish was prepared in such a manner; Hindus, who are not allowed to consume beef, had been eating these delicious fries (Schlosser 125). Because McDonalds did not want to release the secret of their delectable fries, the company had angered an entire religion.

Another beef that Schlosser has with the fast-food industry is actually the beef. Well, not exclusively beef, but how companies treat their live stalk that will soon become a number six. Originally cows and chickens were free to roam the pastures of small family owned farms; their diet consisting of wild grass, but now animals are confined to small cages on large corporate farms and fed genetically enhanced feed (Schlosser 166). The farming corporations are not to blame because these companies are told what to do by the fast-food giants (Schlosser 175). The worst part of this situation is that fast-food companies are forcing the live stalk producers to feed dead cows to live cows. This order is responsible for the spread of E. coli O157:H7, a bacterium found in the digestive tracts of animals that can cause severe food poisoning (Schlosser 192). It is clear that in search of larger profits fast-food companies will risk their customer’s safety just to get ahead.

Conditions in slaughter houses are even worse than those on farms. For example, chickens arrive at the slaughter house they are dumped down a ramp, and at the bottom their legs are attached to an inverted conveyer belt by workers. The belt carries the chickens upside-down to a pool of water that is electro charged, the pheasants are dunked in, stunned, and moved down to their next destination, a sharp rotating blade that will slit their throats. Finally, the chickens are dunked in a bath of hot boiling water to remove their feathers and start the cooking process. Some chickens arrive at the boiling bath still alive by means of moving and jostling past the first obstacles (179-180). “The birds that somehow live to this point are boiled to death” (Schlosser 180). This brutal treatment of living creatures is unacceptable. Fast-food companies must use their influence to change the way slaughter houses kill animals. This section of the novel was a wonderful appeal to pathos.

The worst of all fast-food industries blunders is the way in which they entice their clientele. Because of their marketing campaigns, many teens have become obese. One child, Sam Fabirkant, underwent gastric bypass surgery because of his tremendous weight gain from eating fast-food in excessive amounts (Schlosser 202). Many American, both young and old have had situations similar to that of Fabirkant; his story was used by Schlosser to appeal to the pathos of the young reader of Chew On This!. However this argument is faulty because it is not exclusively the fast-food companies’ fault that many Americans are obese. The Unites States is the land of the free, home of the brave; it is our responsibility as the consumer to make smart and strong choices about *our* diet on *our* own.

**Section IV:**

The fast-food industry is not as evil as Schlosser makes it out to be. Companies such as McDonalds have started to offer customers healthier lower calorie options such as salads or grilled chicken sandwiches on wheat rolls (McDonalds). This fast-food tycoon is also starting programs aimed to improve health of adult customers by offering “adult meals.” These grown-up meals include a salad, water, and a pamphlet on a fitness-related topic (Nance). McDonalds has also decided to switch to frying oils which include zero trans fats (McDonalds).

Fast-food in general is not as bad for you as many people think. When consumed in moderation fast-food can be completely fine to eat, if the customer is smart. To stop from gaining too much weight from eating this convenient meal, customers should eat a lighter meal later in the day to make up for the higher caloric intake associated with a fast-food meal. If this procedure is done, and combined with exercise, fast-food can be a part of your monthly diet (Gipson). Fast-food is clearly acceptable to eat, and not completely horrible as Schlosser depicts it to be.

Consumers must be held responsible for their own decisions. Fast-food companies cannot be blamed for the obesity epidemic. “According to the surgeon general 60 percent of Americans are overweight and only 19 percent exercise on a regular basis” (Nance). Clearly Americans need to take control of their diet and get active. Fast-food companies are not shoving food down customers’ gullet; it is the consumers’ choose what they put into their body. Fast-food consumption alone is not responsible for obesity, lack of exercise is the culprit paired with overeating.

**Section V:**

Eric Schlosser does make many valid points in Chew On This!. However, I do not agree with all of the author’s statements. Fast-food companies do mistreat their employees. Also, in the past, the company has failed to consider the effects on their action, especially regarding minority groups with certain dietary restrictions. Fast-food companies need to restructure the way they slaughter their meat. Nevertheless, the fast-food industry is not responsible for the obesity epidemic facing the nation. I believe Schlosser upholds this statement because of his extensive education. The author most likely attacked this industry because he wants to end the way teens and Americans on the whole eat. If the author can dissuade people from eating fast-food by exposing the flaws of the companies that provide this service then Schlosser has succeeded.

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